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ART AS A RATIONAL USE

I make this a plea for Art as a rational use, because in any other light it deserves no serious consideration among the world's great activities. It would, of course, be absurd to claim that art as commonly understood is always rational, or that artists are always useful, for we find as full types of use and misuse of the rational and the irrational among artists as a class as in the ranks of any other great profession. It is not to exalt or to defend the artists that this paper has been written. It is not his use that needs explanation, but ours, as members of the social order of the body politic, the body industrial, the body spiritual.

To have become rational, as we understand reason to-day, is to have entered through obedience to principle into one's inheritance of mental freedom; to have learned by an harmonious adjustment of the spirit to see things no longer conventionally, but by interior light. Art as a rational use is concerned no more with the artist so called than with him who disclaims that title. It regards not the number so much as the quality of the finished products that are given to the world. Completeness of result is not in itself a sign of progress, but the artistic element in such result is a symptom of approaching order in the whole organism.

Art as it becomes more and more a rational use will not lessen the number of artisans, but spiritualize their work. Its real character has always been felt by those in touch with their times—not more in the so-called fine arts than in the ultimatum of every noble idea. We are not called upon to honor one kind of work over another, for, indeed, in a certain sense, as Browning says, "all service ranks the same with God," but to relate each to the whole, as the organs of the body are related to each other. This is its purpose, in guiding a man to the choice of which he can do, not better than his fellows, but better than he can do anything else, to lead him to the fullest expression of his own powers. And therefore the term "rational use" is used in the sense of a service which is not temporary, but functional and organic, and which satisfies an eternal and implanted law.

The world is too full of men and women half-trained in a direction wholly wrong. Thwarted and unsatisfied, the life which would be joy, flowing in its natural channels, serves, perforce, only dwarfed and negative uses in the economy of God's kingdom. Not what will yield a man a living alone, but that which will employ his whole nature, is the work for which he was designed, and in doing which alone is he fulfilling the end of his being. The trouble is less in the half-training

than in the wholly wrong direction. For it is easy to see that to play well an unnatural and irrational part every effort must be concentrated on the training. Whereas, when the mind is faced in the right direction, everything that comes to it trains it. It must even go on training itself as long as it continues to exist. There is a natural conservation of energy toward the carrying out of a rational use, for all heaven—nay, God Himself—is back of it. There is a corresponding dissipation of energy from an irrational one, a sense of loss, of weariness, and of futility.

We cannot explain life, love, happiness, beauty; we can only by laying hold of certain inner principles of adjustment, bring ourselves into the current of their operation. And this is natural law.

Do you remember Bacon's quaint comparisons of certain thinkers and their ways? "The empirical philosophers," he says, "are like to ants: they only lay up and use their stores. The rationalists are like to spiders: they spin all out of their own substance. But give me a philosopher, who, like the bee, hath a middle faculty, gathering from abroad, yet digesting that which is gathered by his own virtue."

It is not so necessary that we should assent to the proposition that all men are created free and equal as that we should recognize the inborn capacity for freedom in every man. Between speaker and listener, giver and receiver, thinker and doer, pulsates the secret sympathy of the ideal, a world in itself, permeating and quickening this outer world of sense, and lending itself to a still more interior world of spirit and of soul. Into this world there is, but one means of entrance, and that, paradoxical as it may seem, is expression—that is, you cannot enter the world of ideals without recognition of those ideals in yourself. You cannot enter consciously into the life of your own ideals except through self-expression, and self-expression is a language not of one, but of many forms. Not the artists so much, says Mr. La Farge, as we ourselves, are responsible for those conventions of art which sometimes hinder and sometimes help this communion. The artist uses such symbols as will bring us to the threshold of his own life, and is forever studying to find those inevitable symbols which must and will draw an answering thrill of recognition from the common heart.

There is but one difference between the artist and the toiler, and that is in the amount of himself that he puts into his work. Not only in architecture, in music, and in all that is generally recognized as art, must a perception of its real function as soul expression be an active principle, but also in those we are accustomed to regard as the more remote forms, the industrial and social arts, those which express our everyday states, and are apt, like the daily winds, the spreading sky, the constant light of day, to be underrated as to their influence upon the inner life. Art must indeed necessarily concern itself more or less with material symbols, for, being the expression of an internal beauty and order, it perpetually seeks to incarnate that order, and so

to reduce external things to order as well. The millennium can never be more than this: a perfected external order, the groundwork of an unending advance, the foothold of the ladder of our dreams. Because art is a rational use, it must work upon these materials not by formula, nor with compulsion, but according to inherent laws, and it will find its symbols by a kind of inspiration that is recognized as "divinely safe."

We do not need to be told that upon everything that comes from the hand of God is stamped something of His image—His steadfastness in the rock, His sleepless love in every fruitful tree and flower, the infinite adaptations of His wisdom in the varying intelligences of the animal world. To disguise or distort their intrinsic character is not rational, but irrational. There is, for example, a law within stone which makes one treatment of it inherently right, and not another; there is a law within the cloud, never two moments alike, which is violated by any but the most subtly suggestive handling. To cloud the purity of His colors or His marble by the expression of an ignoble idea, as a workman may, or to blazon forth nature's delicate instinctive reserves by ill-chosen details—this is not working according to inherent laws, but against them. And upon such a basis the new art criticism is being founded. In everything to which man has put his hand rationally and with reverence, this spiritual image is not lost, but rather made to blossom with a more human beauty—the beauty born of appreciation, and reflecting a growing adjustment to the divine spirit in our own mental states. The mysterious richnesses of color that we find in Oriental art are born of their dreamy, contemplative philosophy. Something of the same poetic quality is found in the work of all the recognizedly artistic nations, even where the forms are still crude and heavy. According to their more or less patient love for their great teacher, Nature, have they learned perfection, for appreciation is the measure of realization. We ourselves are but on the threshold of our life history. Our Western art has before it a future as great as is its willingness to recognize a relationship to life, broad, deep, and human, and founded not in mysticism or the emotions alone, but in functional and organic laws, deeply felt and loftily understood. If the Oriental speaks to something in us occult, aristocratic, elect, the Occidental speaks to something catholic, fundamental, democratic, and if slower in point of time to rise to maturity, bears all the more surely within its bosom the promise of a fruition equal to the needs of a civilization such as the world has never seen.

It is impossible to consider art as a rational use without considering it as a sociological factor. The sociological value of art training is, first in the preservation, and then in the civilization of

"That primal sympathy,
Which having been, shall ever be,"

and in the revelations it is constantly making to mind and soul of their real nature and capabilities, of the mighty possibilities that lie awaiting development in nature and in man. There is some basis for Mr. Kidd's observation, in view of what history and experience record of the best achievement and growth under most varying and adverse circumstances, that education does not matter nearly so much as we think it does, that there is too much of it for the development of any higher life—that education is, in short, a fad of the hour. It is not, let me repeat, the amount of the training, but its direction, that is tragic, irrational, and unreal. There is no doubt at all that the aim must be changed from a selfish to a social end. "So far as education is purely intellectual," we are reminded, "it only trains for a fiercer part in the great human struggle for personal ends." For this coming generation "we must do something more than cultivate brain power; we must also guide it." And again: "There is evidence that the education of the future will be sociological, that the supremacy which has hitherto been accorded to the physical sciences will be transferred to the sociological studies."* Not to the sociological studies as such, let me add, but to the sociological integrity of all studies. And to have found the sociological basis of a study is to have found its relation to life, and to have opened up the channels of its artistic expression along the lines of inherent law.

Dr. Dewey (of Chicago University) holds that the ultimatum or translation, as he expresses it, into the plane of activities is a necessary part of all imagery—that is, that an image which has not been ultimatum cannot be said really to exist; that the value of symbols is not in themselves, but in their liberating power; that uncontrolled imagery is a psychological evil, and that the technique of music, of drawing, of modeling, of action of any kind, is merely that phase of expression which by selection and domination of mediums helps to realize more perfectly the vision. No one who knows children at all intimately—and it is in the as yet unspoiled activities of children that these laws are best studied—can fail to see the truth of these statements. They prove themselves in every movement of a child's play, in his endless imitation, in his constant handling of things. The instinct is to realize the image in such a way that it may react upon and perfect itself. The period of active imagery is the period of phenomenal growth in every way. Think of those first six years! We have only to look within ourselves to appreciate how impotent the external suppression of imagery has made us. All sorts of devices attempt to remedy the evil—Delsarte, elocution, memory, helps of all kinds. Every teacher remembers the familiar response, "I know, but can't express it." There is a hint of unfulfilled law in this, and there is also some truth in the answer, "Unless you can express it, you do not know it." Not in words perhaps, but in some sort of symbol,

* Byron C. Mathews, *Popular Science Monthly*, July.

sound, form, color, or action, expression is necessary to realization. There is an instinctive recognition of the fact that abstract truth is incomplete; of the great law of reaction, by which the native soul, working through the mind, is in turn developed and unfolded by it—by its inbreathings and outgoings, by its questions and answers, its demands and its responses.

This is the hidden justification in all arguments for manual training as well as for music in our schools, for drawing, for physical culture, for the technique of expression in whatever form. For art is, as all artists know well, a life education. The teacher is the learner, and it is his power to endlessly progress, his ability to see both upward and downward, which transmutes what is his own of the past and present into the real honey of Hymettus, fit for the mind's refreshment and renewing. Did not Violet le Duc years ago point out that an artistic training helped a boy to find his use? This principle of use, of true direction, is the great quest of the hour.

Tremendous as is the actual knowledge acquired in the kindergarten, it is of secondary importance compared with the preservation of that attitude of purity and harmony so necessary to the growing soul, that habit of whole-souled occupation, that recognition of the imagination and of the educative power of reaction.

What greater service can the school render your child, the daily vigor of whose self-life is expanding with his interests, than to foster and develop some innate love of use which shall at once uplift that self-life and train it to its full capacity? Not self-surrender, but self-control, is art.

What higher function have our universities, multiplying as they are, than the increase of centers for the conservation and cultivation in the mind's garden of that other sure-to-be-awakened human love, the flower of all, the love of truth!

And what can be the significance of the spread of practical philanthropy to-day, the notable increase in clubs and congresses, which mediate between thought and life, but the half-understood beginning of a return of first principles, a descent which is internally an ascending? What indeed are we here together for but to give into and take from the common store of knowledge and insight those elements which further each one's special and individual use?

And here we begin to see and must assert the function of art as a rational direction of life's forces. Not as a luxury, a something added to wealth and leisure, a lovable sort of weakness to be condoned in the unbusinesslike, or an exotic outflowing of culture, but as a calling forth of deep-seated instincts, as an orderly arrangement of the mind's forces, a certain balance of the powers, an affirmative attitude of the soul, a rooting of all that is most worth while in mental and spiritual culture in what Carlyle has called "the deep infinite faculties of man, his fantasy, and his heart."

LUCY SILKE.